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American History to 1877 Section 2

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Kenneth Tuckerson, On the Crittenden Amendments

Gentlemen. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to you all today.

Representing Pennyloafer, I am a true product of Kentucky. She has molded me into the man that I am today, and I am forever indebted to Her and Her people. For the past winter, I've had the honor of serving you as your speaker, but today I have the honor of addressing you all concerning the matter that is the amendments to the Constitution proposed by Senator John Crittenden, who serves out of our beloved Kentucky. Today, I would like to formally state that I am for these amendments, at least most of them. These amendments, I truly believe, are the key to the future for our state and for this nation. The passing of these amendments would mean the security of our property rights, enshrined in the Constitution which we hold dear. Should these pass, "Congress shall have no power to abolish slavery in places under its exclusive jurisdiction..." and "[they] shall have no power to prohibit or hinder the transportation of slaves from one state to another". These amendments would also protect slavery for the Western territories, at least until those states established their own Constitutions. In short, the regulation of slavery would fall completely into the hands of the states and their people, and prevent the changing of such for the future.

Now, given the circumstances that befall our nation, it must be understood that these

amendments are some of the last chances we have to prevent secession, which would inevitably lead to war. Let us not forget the council of former Senator David Webster, “There can be no such thing as peaceable secession. Peaceable secession is an utter impossibility.” Tensions are growing ever higher, and while Mister John William would be quick to quell “what-ifs”, I argue that war, in the current socio-economic climate, is an if, not a when. Gentlemen, of all the things that we have debated and argued for the good of Kentucky’s people, it is imperative that we align on this: we cannot let war befall our country and our state. I remember the harrowing scenes that befell Bleeding Kansas, the bloodshed that came about. Imagine those scenes on a national scale. That is why we need these Amendments to pass, for not just the industry that we hold here, but to save the lives of potentially hundreds of thousands of men, good men, who would undoubtedly die if war were to break out, no matter who is the victor. I also feel the need to remind you all that, when those casualties come piling in, when mothers, wives, and children will ask, “Where is my son? Where is my husband? Where is my father?” it will be us who answer them, the gentlemen who couldn’t figure out a way to compromise without carnage.

I also understand that within this room, there are those who oppose these amendments, for one reason or another. Months ago, our governor advised us to “move forward with wisdom, patience, and respect for one another”. With respect for the kaleidoscope of perspectives brought to you on this floor by the many wonderful gentlemen, I say this. This country, and by extension our state, is built on compromise. Recall the words of Former Senator Henry Clay, “what is a compromise? It is a work of mutual concession - an agreement in which there are reciprocal stipulations - a work in which, for the sake of peace and concord, one party abates his extreme demands in consideration of an abatement of extreme demands by the other party: it is a measure

of mutual concession - a measure of mutual sacrifice.” Gentlemen, the Crittenden Amendments are called, by its detractors, such a thing. A compromise. In order to prevent abhorrent bloodshed, carnage of which can only be brought about by that detestable thing that is war, people must compromise. Such concessions, as past concessions have been similarly criticized, may seem like a mere pushing of the bill down the table, to which someone must pay, but for the lives of our Kentucky and American brethren, we have to hope and bet on any means by which peace can be attained.

Allow me to demonstrate my own compromise. I, as many of the gentlemen here are, a slaveowner myself. And the amendments offered, while very beneficial to us slaveowners, will not be approved by the nation in its current form. The North is not willing to budge on their stance regarding Westward expansion of slavery, and sees these Amendments as everything the South wants and more. Additionally, many of the South find them insufficient to deter secession. With this in mind, we must be very deliberate on which of these amendments we approve, and be ready to make concessions on our own interests, for the good of the nation and its people. On the topic of the people, I feel impressed to remind everyone of some counsel shared by Mister Bawyer Binton. Mister Binton said, “The common people who cannot afford slaves are faced with little option but to live in poverty or turn elsewhere for opportunity.” Gentlemen, we are servants for the common people. As such, our actions should reflect their wills, and we should be ready to sacrifice some of our own personal interests for them. I shan’t forget the words of the late Mister John Calhoun’s words on the matter, given in his posthumous *Disquisition on Government*. His words are such: “...nothing is more difficult than to equalize the action of the government, in reference to the various and diversified interests of the community, and nothing

more easy than to pervert its powers into instruments to aggrandize and enrich one or more interests by oppressing and impoverishing the others.” Gentlemen, the task that we have been given by the people is a hard one, balancing all their desires with our own, but it is my hope that there is a way, and it will not come without sacrifice on our part. Now do not let this be evidence of me holding any kind of pity or sentiment for the property we possess. To that avail, I utilize the [Racism Argument] in defending the rights we hold to our property.

As mentioned before, these amendments are far from impermeable. Both sides have their grievances with it. It is my personal feeling, however, that we as Kentuckians stand in a position to approve these amendments. Our geological position as between the two sides, as well as the diversity in thought and motive that resides within our legislature make us the ideal candidates to approve these Amendments, to hold out the olive branch and hopefully prevent this war that is about to come upon us. Perhaps Lincoln was right, in that a divided House must pick a side, lest it all come crashing down. Perhaps we may end up on the wrong side, or worse, on no side and end up being the landscape for the frontlines of the war. But my duty as a Kentuckian, my conscience as a human demands that I at least give it a try, that I at least give compromise, give peace, a chance. Thank you.

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